



Protecting Wildlife for our children's future



SENATE FISH AND GAME

EXHIBIT NO. 19

DATE 1/20/11

BILL NO. SB 144

**TESTIMONY OF TOM FRANCE
ON SENATE BILL 144
MONTANA SENATE FISH AND GAME COMMITTEE
JANUARY 20, 2011**

Members of the Committee, I am Tom France, Regional Director of the National Wildlife Federation's Northern Rockies and Prairies Regional Center, based in Missoula. For the last 30 years, NWF has based a regional program in Montana to promote wildlife conservation in Montana and to represent our more than 5,000 Montana members. We also work very closely with our state affiliate, the Montana Wildlife Federation.

NWF was created in 1936 when hunters and anglers from around the country gathered in Washington, D.C. at the request of President Roosevelt to find solutions to the crisis that face wildlife in the depths of the dust bowl and the depression. 75 years ago, those sportsmen decided a national organization was needed to represent them and created NWF. They also decided that well funded wildlife programs at the state level were essential if wildlife was to survive and thrive. NWF's first mission was to work with Congress and pass the Pittman-Robertson excise tax on ammunition and firearms which has provided essential funding for state fish and wildlife programs for over 7 decades.

Sportsmen and women, working with the professional wildlife biologists at the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks have successfully restored many fish and wildlife species in Montana and today the state's abundant fish and wildlife resources are literally of international significance. These achievements have been achieved by using all of the tools in the tool box of professional wildlife management. Reintroductions, protective hunting and fish regulations, land acquisition, landowner agreements, conservation easements, habitat enhancement and public education are just a few of tools that are in regular use.

NWF has been deeply involving solving bison management problems in the Yellowstone for the last 10 years. In 2003, we worked with willing landowners to move livestock off of public lands on the Horse Butte peninsula on Hebgen Lake and we lead the private fundraising efforts to secure a bison easement across the Royal Teton Ranch in the Yellowstone River valley. We think both of these initiatives demonstrate the FWP, working with landowners and groups like NWF, can solve management issues and allow bison on a larger landscape.

NWF opposes SB 144 for two primary reasons. First, instead of building on the state's legacy of wildlife restoration, SB 144 would forever end the discussion of restoring wild bison to suitable landscapes in Montana. By legislative fiat, SB 144 orders Montana FWP to stop examining the potential for wild bison restoration or working with the many different interests that must be a part of any bison restoration plan. Had the legislature interfered with similar efforts to restore elk or antelope or wild trout, Montana would be much poorer place today, both spiritually and economically.

Second, for the state's entire history, the legislature has provided broad mandates for fish and wildlife conservation to FWP and then allowed the professional fish and wildlife managers employed by the Department to use their best judgments in how to proceed. SB144 abandons professional wildlife management and substitutes for it the political judgments of the legislature. Again, absent professional wildlife management, Montana would be a much poorer place.

I'd ask the members of this committee to consider what will happen if it votes down SB 144. We all know that FWP will proceed carefully with any bison restoration efforts. Landowners will be consulted, landscapes will be examined, and a public process will go forward where all concerned will be involved. If bison are brought back to a particular place, FWP has the tools solve site specific problems, be solved, local economies will become more diverse, and the larger public will salute Montana for its achievement. Why, on reflection, would this committee simply say no to such a process and such an outcome? Please vote no on SB 144.